

**CUTTING THREADS, CONNECTING VOICES:
PRAGMATIC STUDY OF TUSAU KESU IN DIGITAL CONTEXT**

By

Madina Mussagazina

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how ritual language and digital communication meet at crossroads with a deep examination of bata, a traditional Kazakh form of blessing, and its practice on social media. Focusing specifically on TikTok videos of the tusau kesu ceremony, a Kazakh life-cycle ritual celebrating children's first steps, it investigates how users engage with and reinterpret bata through comments within the platform's environment. This study largely draws on Erving Goffman's participation framework theory to examine how traditional Kazakh blessings, bata, are recontextualized and transformed within the interactional spaces of TikTok. The research employed a qualitative design, analyzing user comments under TikTok videos depicting tusau kesu to examine how bata blessings are produced, received, and reconfigured in digital spaces. By categorizing types of comments and mapping participation roles, the study generated evidence on the shifting dynamics of speaker-hearer relationships and the broader cultural implications of digital ritual practices. Findings of this research reveal that bata in its digital form extends beyond the traditional dyadic speaker-hearer communicative dynamics, exhibiting a multilayered and nuanced participation that allows us to "hear" generationally and spatio-temporally removed voices. The analysis also revealed that the participation of some bata might also be centered around one individual, the self, or the imagined collective whole, the nation. As a Kazakh ritual-centered case study of blessing communication within an asynchronous digital environment, this study contributes both to the fields of ritual language studies and linguistic anthropology by expanding the understanding of bata as a speech act. Bata, as observed in this study, persists and transforms in the digital space as a multidialogic and asynchronous speech act that accommodates fresh forms of addressivity, audience participation, and spatio-temporal flexibility, while retaining its core functions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BLESSINGS IN KAZAKH CULTURE

The concept of blessing among Turkic cultures is a deeply rooted practice that is considered to accompany a person in all important life-situations. Performing an edificatory and protective functions, the tradition of blessing-sharing that arose in times of pagan practice, has retained its salience later during the period of religion change and a transition into industrial and post-industrial cultures. Now, in times of rapid technological advancements that resulted in expansion of communicative abilities, the practice of *bata*, blessing, sharing undergoes a new round in its development, being used in online spaces as virtually transmitted acts of blessings directed at people who are geographically and temporarily removed from their senders. Blessings have been and are still omnipresent in the daily lives of Kazakh people. They are shared when one is born and expressed when one leaves our world. They are voiced when one enters the family and leaves it upon embarking in educational pursuits in foreign lands. Therefore, blessings occupy a significant place in the daily life of Kazakh people as a distinct genre. Considering the salience of this practice, in this research, I attempt to capture the dynamics of blessings exchanges shared in the comment sections under videos on TikTok containing the *tusau kesu* practices.

Blessings were largely collected as specimens of oral folklore in the late 19th and 20th centuries by ethnographers studying Kazakh folklore and mode of life (Radloff et al., 1990; Divaev, 2008). Their contemporaries, Mashimbayeva, Suleeva and Yessetova, have grouped Kazakh blessings into different suggestive categories based on the wishes posed on blessings' recipients - they have

identified blessings of satisfaction, delight, contentment, pleasure, approval, support, favor, and consolation that varied in terms of the wishes posed and their field of application (2021). As it can be observed, the identified types of blessings exhibit three elements: ethical, directing the addressee's morality, lexical, verbalizing ritualized formulae, and imperative, conating to an action (Zharmakina, 2019). This prompts the study of blessings as speech acts, specifically goal-oriented commissive acts that commit the addressee to some future states or actions (Murodova, 2024; Dubuisson, 2017). In addition to this, blessings have been studied as borderline cases between expressives and directives, both indicating people's states and beliefs as well as commanding the recipient to some action (Badarneh, 2022).

As expressive, directive, and commissive speech acts, blessings in Kazakh culture are generally divided into two main categories: positive and negative. Positive blessings, *aq bata*, are well wishes shared when individuals embark on any new endeavor or journey along their life paths, their *zhol*. These types of blessings typically direct recipients to achieve socially accepted, successful roles and states, and also to commit to certain positive emotions. Positive *bata* is believed to cure the individual at whom it is directed and reverse the potential adversities posed in their way. This is the reason why the people giving *bata* are considered to have special power and imbue their *bata* with virtue that is transferred through words. More specifically, *bata* is given by elder people who have earned their place in the given society either due to their moral authority or vast life experience. It is culturally believed that the received *bata* should become the "heart and mind of the recipient" in order for the blessing to occur in the world (Dubuisson, 2017). Indeed, this points to the commissive nature of *bata* given that it commits the recipient to ensure the realization of the shared blessings.

As for negative blessings, *teris* bata, they are believed to have a curse-causing force behind them, with people utilizing this kind of blessing to invoke punishment onto the recipient of their wish. As a reverse type of blessing, this speech act is completed with “palms facing down” to signify rejection and condemnation (Mashimbayeva, Suleeva and Yessetova, 2021). This type of bata does not have any specific requirements for the addressee's role occupation, as punishment can be invoked by anyone against anyone. However, the cultural belief posits that one who receives negative bata, imparts its force on their descendants as well. Thus, the reception end of the negative blessing acts might be extended to cover those who have not even been born yet.

Currently practiced Kazakh bata has been shaped by its two root sources: paganism and Islam (Zharmakina, 2019). First, as a ritualized aphoristic speech formula that has been remembered and orally shared as a toast and then as the first Quran surah of al-Fatiha, shared as a prayer or toast that is legitimized by and occasionally directed to God. The tradition of bata-sharing proved to be flexible as it retained its essence in the long process of religious transition. As a “folklore heritage” and a “diagnostic tool” of Kazakh people, blessings that rely on both non-religious and religious formulae are said to demonstrate the cultural attitudes and everyday trials and tribulations of the nation (Mashimbayeva, Suleeva and Yessetova, 2021; Dubuisson, 2017). For instance, they are chiefly used to mark life transitions, express moral values, and guide individual behavior through socially sanctioned formulaic expressions. Given the variety and ubiquity of life transitional periods, bata, therefore, represents an anticipated act that occurs in specific contexts.

BLESSINGS AS OPENING ACTS OF ONE'S ZHOL

Blessings are also approached as transformative actions “through which communities mediated value essential to community viability” (Sweet, 2020). In Kazakh culture specifically, it is believed that blessings act as “holy texts” of ancestors that maintain spiritual culture and national essence as well as regulate people’s behavior (Mashimbayeva, Suleeva and Yessetova, 2021; Zharmakina, 2019; Seitzhanov, 2020). Used before and during life cycle rituals, *bata* is considered to provide their receivers with “life lessons” or “beginning action” necessary for making a step, sometimes literal, further in their larger journey of life (Dubuisson, 2017). Hence, *bata* is not only life-training, but also life-accompanying, practiced primarily during specific life-transitioning occasions or circumstances during one’s life.

The completion of life-transitioning events is symbolically marked and legitimized by the concept of *zhol ashu*, translated literally as opening of the path. As a cultural understanding of opening and paving one’s life road ahead, the concept largely relies on blessings that secure the necessary movement across the given ladder of life. The movement commences at the first life-cycle ritual of one’s life, the naming ceremony and celebration called *shildekhana*, during which elders bless the child with health and long life. The next ritual that relies on *bata* is *tusau kesu*, thread-cutting ritual that marks child’s first steps, the central ritual for this study. As a rite of passage that takes place when children typically become one year old, this life cycle event depends on blessings for recognizing and celebrating child’s *zhol* being opened literally and figuratively, as their physical ability to walk indicates the beginning of their journey through life. The rest of the life-cycle cultural events operate more on a figurative meaning of *zhol* as one’s life path, given the lack of

focus on the literal ability to walk. For instance, coming of age milestones as *siindetke otyru* that marks boys' initiation into adolescence or marriage-related events like *betaşar*, the tradition of presenting bride's face to her future husband's family, mark the idea of one's life path only metaphorically, since they serve as symbolic transitions into new social roles rather than physical steps. In the same fashion, life cycle events related to one's departure to studies or service overseas, which are also generally accompanied with blessings, stand as larger metaphors for one's mobility and academic or work-related growth.

Any life cycle event, starting from wedding-related rituals and finishing with funerary rites, of adult life of Kazakh people is imagined and framed with acts of bata-sharing and bata-reception. As a marker of transition, each rite of passage and life cycle ritual becomes intertwined into a whole lifetime of blessings. In fact, these events and blessings shared during them become "so ubiquitous that [they] acquire a mild invisibility", making us unintentionally disregard their social function (Dubuisson, 2017). As it can be observed, *tusau kesu* as a life cycle rite of passage operates on a different level in terms of blessings as it celebrates not only the child's first steps as toddlers but also the metaphorical opening of their life path. As a lived concept, this gets intensified with the use of a long white carpet-like cloth, called *aq zhol*, white path, on which the child goes through the thread-cutting part of the ceremony. By taking their first steps in life, both metaphorically and literally, the children get showered with blessings, mostly directed from their families, that express speaker's heightened emotivity and direct children to accomplish the greater socially accepted roles and responsibilities. The central act of cutting the threads magically binds the *tusau kesushi*, the person performing the act of cutting, and the child, due to the magical aspect of the act itself. Through symbolic and contagious magic, the child gets imbued with the personal

qualities of the tusau kesushi and their zhol is said to get significantly affected by their participation.

MAGIC OF BATA AND TUSAU KESU

When we approach the concept of magic, schemas of witchery, with trickery and incantations, as well as illusionary fantasies are evoked in our minds. Behind these other-worldly associations, there exists an interpretation of magic that highlights the core of human belief and behavior, enacted in attempts to explain the unexplainable. As an ancient practice, magic has fascinated scholars of various fields throughout history precisely for its relation not just with the supernatural but social too. Although Frazer discussed magic as being highly irrational and based on “a mistaken [and illegitimate] association of similar ideas”, his description of the ways in which it is applied in various cultures in contexts of moderating the unknown can be fruitful in explaining the behavior of those participating in the Kazakh tusau kesu ritual and the nature of the ritual itself too (1922).

Much like the challenge in defining religion, characterizing magic has been considered a “maddening task” since the phenomenon held onto various descriptions that were “products of their time” (Davies, 2012). Much of the grand socio-anthropological approaches of magic still used in the study of magical practices across the world today emerged on the cusp between the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting the prevailing Eurocentric perspectives and colonial contexts of that era. This is partly why magic has been considered a very “unstable category” as the Eurocentric perspective has been defined in association with primitivism, overlooking it as

substandard or primitive (Bailey, 2006). To illustrate, referring to magic as a “bastard sister of science” and “an abortive art”, James Frazer posited that the phenomenon is enacted as an imperfect attempt of “savages” to understand and manipulate the world (1922). Largely critiqued for its colonial crudeness by Wittgenstein, Frazer’s ideas (1979). As for contemporary theories, as Bailey suggests, they aspire to move away from the lens of primitivism associated with magic and approach the phenomenon as an element of culture that aids in understanding a given society and its beliefs (2006). Given the general lack of precision in the way magic has been characterized in scholarship, Bailey calls for approaching magical practices within their specific cultural and historical contexts (2006). This is what I am going to attempt to do in this section of Introduction – to put both magic and tusau kesu in contexts of each other.

As an important part of Kazakh culture, acts of giving blessings, bata, are imbued with magical and social importance, creating threads of cultural continuity between past, present, and future. As a form of contagious magic, bata captures not just a blessing coming from one individual to another, but rather a collective blessing with an “ingrained presence of ancestors” that is passed on like a contagion from one generation to another (Dubuisson, 2017). The acts of giving a blessing function as an instrument of acknowledging collective conscience that contributes to the sense of social integration as when it is not expressed, Kazakh people could feel a sense of discomfort and social disruption (Durkheim, 2014; Dubuisson, 2017). Bata, in some way, is a verbal gift and a cyclical multi-generational mechanism of guidance because shared wisdom imparted to young individuals acts like a “part of life training” in the Kazakh community (Dubuisson, 2017). As an anticipated and shared act, bata is largely embedded in a structured system of social relations among Kazakhs as it creates social bonds and obligations in the community. Similarly, acts of

sharing, as acts of symbolic exchanges, performed within different rituals and acts of gift-giving in Kazakh culture are viewed as manifestations of sympathetic and contagious magic that contribute to the preservation of archaic forms of socio-economic relations among the Kazakhs by creating connections that go beyond individual transactions (Suraganova 2007). Kazakh sharing and gift-giving practices are based on the concept of *yrym*, superstition, the performance of which supposedly brings happiness, prosperity, and good luck or prevents failure and misfortune when not followed (Valikhanov quoted in Suraganova, 2007). As Suraganova argues, the acts of superstition followed in such practices of sharing are expressions of normative behavior as Kazakh people view them as vital necessities that if not followed could cause misfortunes brought by benevolent forces (2007). This is a manifestation of Durkhemian collective representation since adherence to superstitious acts is a product of social Kazakh collectivity (2014). As Durkheim posited, such products of social collectivity contribute to the maintenance of social order, and in Kazakh society specifically, the observance of rituals like *tusau kesu* and acts of blessing within it serve as reaffirmations of the shared collective values and intergenerational solidarity (2014). People are expected to participate in and value these ritualistic practices not merely out of habit, but because they are perceived as morally binding and culturally essential duties that ensure the continuity of social harmony and protection from misfortune, especially towards one's life path, their *zhol*. Thus, conforming to such social norms in the given context strengthens social cooperation and cohesion. By being based on a shared understanding of prosperity and communal well-being, these expressions of magic within *bata*-sharing acts help to promote a shared sense of unity and continuity among the Kazakh people, strengthening the multi-generational Kazakh social cohesion.

SYMPATHETIC MAGIC

Frazer categorized two versions of sympathetic magic: one, also known as imitative magic, based on principles of similarity in which “like produces like” and “an effect resembles its cause”, and another based on principles of “contagion”, when “things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed” (1922). Although much of the language that Frazer used to describe the kinds of magic that he defines in his book, *Golden Bough*, is highly ethnocentric and colonial, his conceptualization is highly relevant in understanding and explaining the ways in which people comprehend this world and the unknown. Frazer argues that through the connection of “invisible ... secret sympathy”, two different things exert influence on one another at a distance (1922). One of the examples that Frazer gives to describe the principles of imitative magic is subjecting a person to harm based on the harm caused to the image or object depicting them. Since like produces like, the injuries caused to the image of one person would cause injuries to the person themselves. The sympathy between things is established through the likeness created between them - an object or an act must, in one way or another, resemble the desired end it pursues. Hence, mimicry is the main principle through which sympathetic magic is enacted in the world. In this way, sympathetic magic can be enacted with positive intentions as well – blessings are of primary example.

As proposed by Frazer, sympathetic magic can be used in rites through which people harness the best from the plants or the animals (1922). Meals prepared from bull meat involve sympathetic magic as the power derived from the animal and its meat is transferred to those who consume the meal. In the same way, the version of the tusau kesu rite followed in the South of Kazakhstan

harnesses virtue from the animal's intestines or sweet onion by tying them along with the woolen threads that are then tied around the child's feet. Moreover, sympathetic magic is enacted in the tusau kesu tradition with the act of cutting the threads producing the act of the transfer of qualities from the chosen figure to the child, following the principle of "like producing like". This act symbolically transfers the admired personal traits, for instance it could source strength or success of the thread-cutter and pass it onto the child, as the cutting becomes not merely a physical gesture but a magical operation linking both of the participants' futures and hence life paths. As an object symbolizing connections between the past and present, the woolen threads also point to the cultural expression that is salient in many enactments of sympathetic and contagious magic in Kazakh culture, as in bata and sharing practices. Bind together as threads, the past and present get to intertwine and imbue the life path of the ritual body with the positive virtues of the previous generations sent to the future ones. In addition to this, the sympathetic connection is supposed to exist between the object that the child chooses when they finish walking on the white cloth that is laid out in front of them, with the object and the color of white signifying their bright life path ahead of them. Traditionally, the child has to choose between objects that depict the traditional ideas related to success: car keys or money representing wealth, a book representing knowledge and good education, and a musical instrument representing a penchant for creativity.

Most importantly, the act of giving bata too can be approached through the lens of sympathetic magic, since it stands as a practice that is rooted in the principle that verbal expressions can help bring about real-world outcomes by resembling or evoking them linguistically. In bata, blessings are articulated with a very specific, formulaic phraseology that list the desired virtues, typically health, success, or prosperity, with the belief that speaking these words aloud helps to manifest those qualities in the recipient's life. Just as in sympathetic magic where the symbolic act is

believed to influence reality, the spoken bata is not merely performative but is imbued with the power to shape the future, especially when uttered by respected elders or community members perceived to have spiritual or moral authority. In this way, the blessing becomes a symbolic channel through which the desired state is called into being.

CONTAGIOUS MAGIC

Frazer describes contagious magic as being based on some sort of infection as one “infects trees or plants with qualities or accidents, good or bad, resembling and derived from his own” through direct contact (1922). The most universal example of this kind of magic enacted in the world, according to Frazer, is the act of exerting harm onto the person through the harm of things that were once in their possession, i.e. their hair, nails, personal belongings (1922). Contagion can also exert positive resemblances: pilgrims, upon their return, being blessed with the blessings of the sacred spaces could impart the holiness of their experience onto others by touch (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004). An example of contagious magic within the realm of Kazakh traditions is the practice of filling household dishes with milk or water the night before the Nauryz holiday commences. Dishes that come into contact with these liquids are wished to be filled with them all year long. This practice also has an element of sympathetic magic as well considering the belief that the essence of one thing influences another: water is sympathetically connected with the essence of life, and milk with wealth.

Magical connection is also established with the parts of the body that were once attached or connected to a person, such as the navel string or placenta (Frazer, 1922). Frazer posits that according to the law of contagion, if a child’s umbilical cord has been properly treated, they will

thrive (1922). This example of the principle is echoed in the Kazakh tradition of *kindik şeşy*, in which the right to perform the act of cutting and treating the umbilical cord of the child is given to a lively and respectful young woman, who transfers the greatest personal qualities associated with her to the child through that act of cutting the navel string. The popular expression of “*kindik apasy qandai bolsa, bala da дәl sondai bolady*” (like *kindik şeşe*, like the child) highlights the contagious connection between the godmother and the child established in this practice. Hence, according to this rite, the woman who has been in contact with the child’s umbilical cord could define the child’s personality and future as she has established the “sympathetic union with the [child’s] body”. Here, “the fortunes of the individual for good or evil throughout life” are not just presupposed with a good treatment of the umbilical cord, but also with the bond created through the act of cutting the cord (Frazer, 1922). Interestingly, the contagious aspect of the practice is not only directed in the child’s direction. The act of cutting the cord can also influence the chosen woman’s fertility as, according to popular belief, she herself would be luckier in becoming a mother if she cuts the umbilical cord of someone else’s baby. Hence, in this practice, magic is bidirectional, which echoes the idea that a “fruitful woman makes plants fruitful” and fruits make her fruitful in turn (Frazer, 1922).

The same magical dynamic of the law of contagion is traced in the *tusau kesu* ritual. For instance, the version of *tusau kesu* practices on South of Kazakhstan also possesses contagious character: intestines or sweet onion tied along the woolen threads are said to transfer their protective or strengthening properties through contact. Their prior association with animals or humans imbues them with potency that rubs off on the child through physical proximity. Blessings too, when spoken enter into direct contact with the child, establishing the contagious link between the sage speaker and the child. In addition to this, those guests who witness the ritual and become the

participants of the blessings addressed to the child, could, by virtue of being in the same room, get imbued with the transmission of the blessings and their positive character.

PARTICIPATION FRAME OF BATA

Blessings in Kazakh culture almost always involve at least two people: the person making the blessing and the person at whom the blessing is directed. Each position could be occupied by several individuals, however, it is typically practiced that one person, the oldest and the most respected individual, produces the blessing and directs it to their audience. Therefore, if we were to use the vocabulary of scholars of participant framework studies, the Speaker and Hearer dynamic of Kazakh *bata*, the producer and recipient of the blessing, consists of a sage occupying the Speaker role, who imparts well wishes onto the Hearer, typically represented by a younger individual (Zharmakina, 2019). As a “conversation between ancestors and the living”, *bata* sometimes could include in its participation frame those who are connected discursively to their ancestors through cultural heritage - young people could analogously stand for their family or even for an entire population of the nation or the world (Dubuisson, 2017). Thus, the addressorship and recipientship of *bata*, being able to be dispersed across generations, presents us with an opportunity to catch the given exchanges of blessings through time and space. In this research, I aim to examine how the traditional frames of *bata*-giving practice are converted into the digital environment of TikTok, particularly in the comment sections under videos documenting *tusau kesu*, a key life cycle transition ritual. I argue that blessing-sharing acts in this online context operate as broader, digitally mediated speech acts characterized by dispersed authorship and reception. These new forms of blessings, thanks to the technological affordances of TikTok, not only reaffirm traditional structures of *bata*-giving and receiving dynamics but also reshape them: they allow anonymous

users and non-Kazakh speakers to participate in *bata* exchanges. As a result, *bata*, as a speech act performed online, can be rapidly transmitted and massively witnessed and responded to. This further provides grounds for extending the layers of meaning of *bata* as new users contribute to and reinterpret prior *bata* utterances. Unlike conventionally shared *bata*, which is typically performed in a face-to-face interaction and in consideration of cultural hierarchical relations, these digitally transmitted blessings invite polyphonic participation and change assumptions about who is authorized to bless, who could receive the blessing, and how blessings themselves could be constructed. We can observe how *bata*, now as both an act with a long history and a digital practice, adapts in response to new technological conditions and trends.

FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

This study specifically focuses on TikTok videos, and this was the choice because the platform serves as a highly interactive and culturally rich site for the performance and circulation of Kazakh rituals in contemporary digital settings. TikTok offers unique technical affordances for public ritual display and rich user commentary, making it a perfect space to observe how online audiences recontextualize and interpret traditional practices such as *tusau kesu*.

The videos included in this research were located using relevant Kazakh-language hashtags such as *#mycaykecep* and *#mycaykecy*, which illustrate videos specifically related to the practice of interest. These hashtags led to a diverse set of publicly available videos representing different ritual enactments across Kazakhstan. The selection of the videos was guided mostly randomly, and it resulted in collecting a series of videos with different levels of engagement. As a result, comment sections of various densities were used to get insight into how blessings are expressed dialogically.

As a study of participation networks observed in comment sections under videos of tusau kesu (first steps) ceremonies, this research aims to answer the following **research questions**:

- *How do TikTok comments function as speech acts?*
- *What participation frameworks do they exhibit?*
- *What participation roles are negotiated in the observed dataset?*
- *What participation roles get fragmented within blessing-type communication?*
- *What dialogues emerge in the comment sections of the shared videos?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

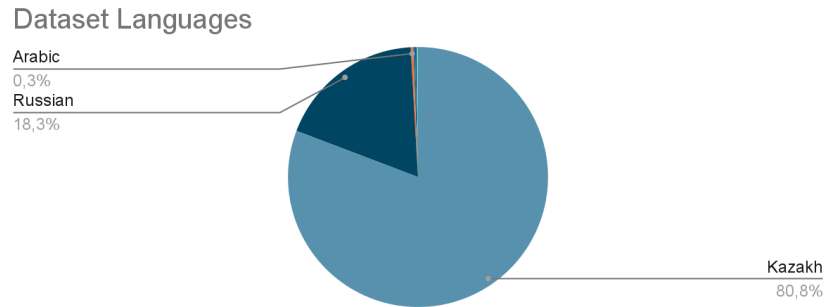
In the early stages of analysis, I drew on Roman Jakobson's theory of language functions to explore the communicative intentions underlying the comments posted under tusau kesu TikTok videos (Jakobson, 1960). Jakobson identifies six constitutive factors in any act of verbal communication, which are context, message, sender, receiver, channel or contact, and code (1960). All of them are associated with a distinct communicative function: referential, poetic, emotive, conative, phatic, and metalingual. This model provided a preliminary lens through which to consider how TikTok users convey their reactions through speech acts, utterances that do not just describe states of affairs of the world but perform social actions through words, such as blessing or congratulating. The notion of speech acts, as developed largely by Austin and Searle, marks how language operates as action (1962; 1969). Although the results of this metafunctional analysis are not presented in this thesis, it served as a theoretical stepping stone toward my main analytical focus of identifying and interpreting the participation frameworks that have emerged within the comments.

Drawing on Erving Goffman's concepts of footing and participation roles, I further attempted to examine how users position themselves and others in the unfolding digital ritual space. I sought to uncover the deeper dynamics of interaction between users, particularly in how roles such as animator, author, and principal emerge and shift in asynchronous comment exchanges (Goffman, 1981). Judith Irvine's model of participation will further help analyze the overlaps and fragmentations in user roles, especially where ritual speech like blessings or critiques invoke layered participation structures that challenge simple speaker-hearer dichotomies (1996).

DATA AND DATA COLLECTION

As this research represents a study of participation frameworks observed in response to tusau kesu ceremonies, the data for the project consisted of publicly shared comments posted by users on the platform of TikTok under videos portraying the ceremonies.

The data collection process began on October 15, when the first video was processed for the comments. The data collection lasted twelve days, and a total of 1675 comments were collected from 10 different videos. Comments were written primarily in the Kazakh language. Russian is the second most common language for comments. Arabic and German comments were also observed, with Azerbaijani, French, Turkish, Ukrainian, Greek, Kyrgyz, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Hungarian comments represented minimally. 17 comments in which users code-switched using Kazakh and Russian were also included in the dataset.



The only source of data collected for this research was a platform called TikTok. Using the search bar on the platform, I have utilized keywords of “*тұсау кесу*” and “*тұсау кесер*” in Kazakh Cyrillic script to choose the appropriate videos for my analysis. Videos were included in the dataset if they contained direct illustration of tusau kesu ceremonies, specifically the central part with the thread-cutting element. No preference was given to the number of views, however engagement scale was taken into account. Only those videos that had active comment sections, with at least 10 user-generated comments posted, were included in the dataset. After randomly choosing 10 appropriate videos, I have started collecting the primary data, the comments under those videos. The dataset represented and analyzed in this research is relevant as it contains videos and comments posted in the period between 14 Nov 2022 and 28 Feb 2024.

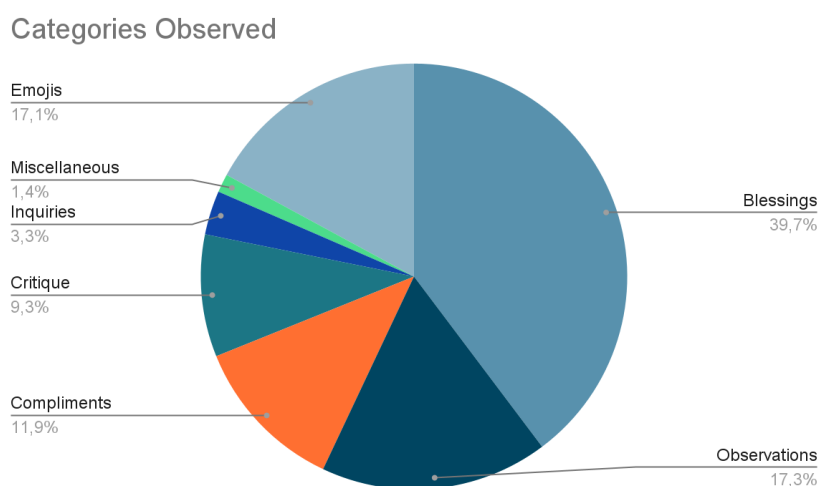
DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative approach of content analysis to detect frequent topical and subtle pragmatic patterns within the collected comments. Data categorization was the next step in the data handling and analysis process. As mentioned earlier, a database of 1675 comments were compiled and classified in terms of the topic. As comments were manually

entered in the Excel sheet during the data collection process, I was able to complete the coding and categorizing steps in the same document, though in a different Sheet. Comments were researched and categorized in terms of the topic, purpose, and the sociocultural phraseologies used in responses to the videos. Comments were hence categorized according to their content: blessings were classified considering messages invoking well wishes, observations referenced descriptions of events observed, emojis contained graphic icons posted as comments, compliments included comments that marked significant polite remarks on appearance, inquiry focused on questions, critique marked users' assessment and judgment of actions observed in the videos, and miscellaneous category contained comments that did not fit any of the afore-mentioned categories. Comments in languages other than Kazakh and Russian were translated at this step as well. Deep examination of comments showed that blessings ranked first as the most frequent response strategy towards the videos posted. Followed by observations, emojis, compliments, and critiques, which also included responses from authors. Inquiries were also observed as a response strategy, though rarely, with occasional miscellaneous remarks made as well. In total, out of 1675 comments collected, approximately 39.7% of comments were represented by blessings. Observations, emojis and compliments, with 17.3%, 17.1%, and 11.9%, were the next common groups in terms of category. Then, as it was revealed, critique was in fifth place, representing 9.3% of the data. Lastly, inquiries and miscellaneous categories comprised 3.3% and 1.4%, respectively.

The participation framework theory by Goffman and Irvine was used to identify and mark the observed participant roles detected in the given dataset (1981; 1996). Overall, the roles of asynchronous Speakers and Hearers were identified. More specifically, the Speaker roles of Speaker/Sender and Speaker/Addressee were observed. In addition to this, Goffman's Author,

Animator, and Principal subroles of Speaker were identified (1981). In addition to this, Primary and Indirect Target roles proposed by Levinson were marked in the dataset as well (1988). The participation role of a co-Speaker proposed by Irvine was also identified and further analyzed (1996). By drawing on Irvine’s discussion of co-Speaking, co-Authoring was also largely discussed. As observed, religious and cultural formulaic language marked the multi-laminated addressivity and recipientship of the messages shared.



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discussed. As observed, religious and cultural formulaic language marked the multi-laminated addressivity and recipientship of the messages shared. In addition to this, the nature of blessing-type utterances is revealed to influence the lamination of the roles observed in not only real-life communication, but also in computer-mediated one too.

DATA TRANSLATION

Primarily, the analyzed data consisted of comments written in Kazakh and Russian. Comments in other languages were noted and translated when used in the analysis. As a non-native speaker of these occasionally met languages, the translation was completed through free online translation websites to make sense of the contents of the comments and categorize them. To ensure clarity of the translation, several translation platforms were used. Producing almost identical translations, all of the translation versions were first collated and then scrutinized for the best version. To ensure the communicative intents of the users who posted the given multilingual comments, the versions were also combined to produce a much clearer translation. As a researcher who is not only familiar with the Kazakh cultural and linguistic landscape but also who practices Kazakh-Russian and Kazakh-English translation, I approached the dataset with cultural sensitivity, while also being as reflective of my interpretations as I possibly could.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study utilizes publicly shared TikTok videos and comments under them connected with the topic of this research. Following ethical guidelines for online-based research, only publicly accessible data was included. Measures were taken to ensure and keep the anonymity of users whose comments were collected, specifically, usernames were omitted and numerically codified to avoid the collection of personal information of users. The focus has been put primarily on the contents of the comments posted and the observed patterns of communication. Considering the observational nature of the given research, no direct engagement has been made with participants.

CHAPTER TWO: PARTICIPATION AND ADDRESS IN RITUAL COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the nuanced and layered participant networks of the collected dataset. In doing so, I will primarily rely on the framework developed by Erving Goffman, who was one of the first scholars to recognize the subtle variations of how people, as Speakers and Hearers, participate dynamically in communication (1981). Since the data analyzed is the collection of responses to multiple TikTok videos with various tusau kesu ceremonies displayed, the discussion of this chapter will be of the dynamics between those who have posted the videos and those who have commented on them. Comment sections on TikTok represent what Goffman referred to as an "open state of talk" in which users can communicate by sharing comments, mostly of the reactionary type (1981). Communication online, specifically via comments, can fit the conventionally described participant roles of many participant framework research pieces, but in consideration of comments that communicate a blessing, peculiarities occur. In my view, the collected responses present an interesting opportunity to investigate the given participant dynamics also from the angle of the so-called mapping problem described by Judith Irvine - the idea that participation is not mapped in a straightforward textbook manner, but rather in an overlapping, flexible, context-dependent fashion (1996). The analysis of the participant structures of comments yielded interesting dynamics that highlight Irvine's idea that participation in communication can be a) fluid, b) atemporal, c) recursive, and d) ambiguous.

Much of the discussion in this chapter will be about the participation on an utterance level, which is the comment level. It will become clear that some participation roles are only realized when one looks beyond an utterance and considers the entire speech event, the videos as stretches of discourse with their comments sections, into consideration. For instance, as it appeared in analysis, the acts of Co-Speaking, with multiple users relaying the same message from different places of the country, activate on a speech event level as separate messages sent to the Sender/Speaker. Moreover, on the same level, divine powers are invited to the participant framework through invocations, thereby expanding the participant structure.

In this discussion, I will attempt to provide an in-depth examination of Speaker, Co-Speaker, Addressee/Hearer, and Target roles (Primary, Indirect, Ultimate Destination) from Goffman and Irvine's frameworks observed in a dataset (1981; 1996). In addition to this, the sub-roles of Speakers as Animators, Authors, and Principals as well as Sponsors, Formulators, and Transmitters will be analyzed to illustrate the variability of participation networks that occur as "shadow conversations" held behind some of the comments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamics of participation in spoken communication have been largely discussed in Erving Goffman's work on footing, in which he laid the grounds for an analytic framework on a model of talk that broke down the "global folk categories" of the primitive notions of Speaker and the Hearer "into smaller analytically coherent elements" (1981, p. 129). He reapproached the idea that communication involves two speakers who take turns of speaking and listening to one another - his largest argument was that the given "global folk categories" of Speaker and Hearer are too simplified and fixed (1981). Instead, he suggests that there are some "analytically coherent elements" that break down the roles of a Speaker into more nuanced roles of Author, Animator, and Principal. In addition to this, he delineated the different types of ratified and unratified, or official and unauthorized, Hearers whose participation varied depending on the level of their involvement in communication. Ratified Hearers for Goffman are Addressees at whom the messages are directed and the Third Party, the rest of the authorized listeners of talk. Unratified listeners, or overhearers, in his categorization include bystanders, accidental hearers, and eavesdroppers, intentional overhearers.

Several of Goffman's colleagues from the field of linguistic anthropology have provided their own tweaks and notes on the observed noticeable differences in participation frameworks between speakers in different circumstances. In their critique of Goffman's theory, researchers point out that Goffman's speakers are the main characters of the participant framework story, and his theory is therefore increasingly "very speaker-centric", decontextualized, and "empirically inaccurate" (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Sweet, 2025; Levinson, 1988). His speakers are "endowed with rich

cognitive and linguistic capacities” and hearers simply “inhabit a separate world”, thereby creating a very asymmetric characterization of participation (Goodman & Goodman, 2004). Upon these critical evaluations of Goffman’s framework, similar remarks were contemplated by earlier anthropologists who have reexamined and expanded typologies of participation - pragmatics and social roles of “relevant Others” were included into the discussions of participant roles fragmentation process (Levinson, 1988; Irvine, 1996). For instance, Levinson filled a previously identified empirical gap in Goffman’s theory by taking a decompositional approach to participation structure and delineating a set of 17 roles under the umbrella of the dyadic Speaker and Hearer (1988). With 17 being an overwhelmingly high number of possible participants involved in message-exchanging, other scholars have suggested to focus on a set of smaller and simpler roles with consideration of overlapping frames of participation and dialogic contexts (Irvine, 1996). With the idea that "the common dyadic model of speaker-hearer specifying sometimes too many, sometimes too few, sometimes the wrong participants" held in mind, Irvine suggested to devote analysis to the role allocation and fragmentation process in order to complete the proper “front-to-back” analysis of roles traced in communication (Hymes, 1974 quoted in Irvine, 1996). As Irvine claims, because “conversational reach [is] backward and forward” in time and space, a layered approach is needed to capture these reaches that intersect one another (Irvine, 1996).

Despite the criticism, the participant network described by Goffman has been largely used as a departure point for further expansion of participant structures. With the fast-paced technological revolution, people are now able to communicate via various messaging applications and nets. The abundance of communicative possibilities online gives us a chance to get a glimpse of nuanced

participant role allocation in asynchronous interactive exchanges as well (Ross and Logi, 2021; Dynel, 2014). The number of studies aimed at analyzing and discussing the dynamics of communication in online space as an asynchronous communicative arena is pretty moderate with much of the research done concerning computer-mediated interaction, focusing on websites and platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (Dynel, 2014; Barreto Filho & Monteiro de Barros, 2021; Draucker and Collister, 2015; Kjeldsen, 2016). These platforms have been analyzed through the prism of Goffman's participation framework as well. For instance, Draucker and Collister approached Twitter's feature of retweets as a reporting tool of stance-taking that spurs the creation of threaded conversations involving various participants with varying degrees of authorship and attribution (2015). Similarly, Kjeldsen analyzed the temporal arrangement of the live-tweeting activity on Twitter and showed how communication could occur between participants, whose exchanges overlap both in spoken communication and online, thereby blurring the participatory boundaries of contexts and engagement (2016). Barreto Filho & Monteiro de Barros, by studying participatory dynamics between Facebook posts' commentators, conclude that the public nature of posts and their comments marks the decay of the idea of ratified participants, which calls for a re-examination of participatory concepts in online communication (2021). The studies of participation frameworks in computer-mediated communication then seem to come to very similar conclusions - affordances of social nets and applications create readjustments of the classic Speaker and Hearer model. Those who make public posts online can never be sure who, when, and how will access the content they have provided the internet with. In addition to this, the ever-growing practice of vlogging style of content even further blurred the boundary between the digital conversation participants considering how the audience is slowly viewed as one immediately present entity rather than a group of individual constituents (Frobenius, 2014). With

the platform's advent in September 2016, no studies have approached the participation frameworks of TikTok users, specifically their exchanges and responses to videos in the comments section of the platform.

This thesis study will attempt to fill this discovered gap by contributing to the larger field of linguistic anthropology. I suggest that it is precisely the study of textually shared blessings in the comment sections of the videos posted on social media, like TikTok, that challenges the traditional participation framework offered by Goffman. As users were identified to be able to occupy several roles at the same time, address temporally and physically removed, and even imagined, participants, and co-perform some roles together, I suggest that it is precisely the mapping process that helps to identify the nuanced participatory dynamics of the users.

SPEAKERS AND HEARERS

Erving Goffman developed his theorization of participation framework proceeding from his work on footing, one's alignment of self in state of talk (1981). As Goffman states, people's footing in conversations is in the constant state of change, which means that the way people envision and actualize themselves in talk gets changed as well. For instance, by illustrating various actualizations of the traditional Speaker roles in different circumstances, Goffman introduces concepts of Animator, Author, and Principal, which all operate on different levels of one's authorship. Whether one is relaying or animating a message, constructing or selecting the right words for it, or standing as one whose attitudes are represented, people's Speakerhood shifts right through state of talk. Furthermore, the role of a Listener or Hearer was systematized by Goffman

as well - he is largely one of the first to divide the reception of messages into ratified or unratified, or legitimate and illegitimate (1981). Hearers might be Addressed by Speakers or implied as legitimate Third-Party Hearers, the rest of the unaddressed yet official interactants. On top of that, Hearers also could be illegitimate, with people intentionally, as bystanders, or unintentionally, as eavesdroppers, overhearing the messages shared.

As an audience of the videos posted on TikTok, users responded with blessings, compliments, queries, criticisms, and observations. In most cases, the use of deictic elements in the dataset helped to establish the Ratified Hearer group of participants of the comments. In majority of the cases, users have addressed children from the videos and their kin as Ratified Addressees of their blessings. In addition to this, users have addressed God as a recipient of their comments.

SPEAKERS AND HEARERS OF COMPUTER-MEDICATED COMMUNICATION

In the given part, I will begin the analysis by marking the dichotomized and generalized Speaker and Hearer roles that can be observed on TikTok. A much deeper discussion of nuances of the given roles will be discussed more in-depth in sections below.

A multiparty interaction classification framework proposed by Dynel gets increasingly effective in understanding the dynamics of participation between Speaker(s), Hearer(s) and Other groups in communication online as it raises an important point for the given field - the audience, the viewers of content, given the technical affordances of online platforms, can take on roles of Speakers as message producers (2014). The communication between Speaker/Sender and Hearer/Recipient then

occurs not only through messages shared privately, but also through those dispersed publicly with comment sections or discussion boards (Ross and Logi, 2021). This change of role, from a Hearer into a Speaker, according to Dynel's framework, occurs in a three-level system of participation: video level (speaker and hearer), recipient level (hearers of the video), and comments level (speakers and hearers of comments) (2011; 2014). Participants involved in such a three-level participation frame are spatially and temporally removed from one another, if not taking into account exceptional occasions when those who comment occupy the same rooms due to their close nature of relationship. This means that theoretically the number of potential unratified participants of a text post-based communication is largely infinite, ignoring the situations when creators close the comment sections of the content they post. Therefore, the number of Hearers could grow exponentially based on the popularity of the videos shared online. Potentially, one can never predict a concrete number of viewers as Hearers in such situations as content online generally can experience waves of fluctuated viewing. Naturally, online communication offers a chance to users to participate without entering the interactive field - one can simply lurk and eavesdrop on public messaging between other users in many different platforms. Such form of "participation" is not disclosed in any way by platforms, except for the stories feature of Instagram, in which users who post images or videos on their feed that expire in 24 hours can see who have viewed the content shared.

The three-leveling structure of participation is explained by the dichotomization of Hearers into those who are physically present and removed (Dynel, 2011; Ross and Logi, 2021). On the first level of interaction, a video interaction level, one can find a Speaker/Speakers as well as Ratified Hearers, both Addressed and Unaddressed, observed in the media format shared. Overhearers,

those excluded from the official state of talk in the content of the video, can also be present in case if content captured their presence, e.g. a video of two people speaking in a crowd. Despite the presence of other participants on this level, it is the role of a Speaker that will be transferred onto the next level of interaction as they, as the central figure of the level, may be, or may not be, communicating with commentators of their content. As mentioned before, the family involved in the ritual performance which would include the child, their parents, and the rest of their extended family as well as closed ones present during the ceremony all were identified as actors whose presence was captured in the videos. Finally, the one of those actors who posts the video online becomes the Speaker/Sender of the level. It is important to note that the audience on this level is not entering the frame of participation as they can simply observe the content shared with them. Unfortunately, authorship of videos today on multiple video-sharing platforms and applications can be traced to individuals who have no connections to the people who have made the content. Content can be stolen by an act of repost with original author's watermark or blatantly without it, committing various acts of content violations. With this being practices, it is possible for people not portrayed in the content posted to then take on the role of Speaker/Sender on the next level of participation. It is worth mentioning such a dynamic considering the popularity of the given practice and my personal uncertainty of the ownership behind videos posted. To avoid making any unlawful remarks on Speaker/Sender and Hearer dynamic, I will be analyzing only those videos in which the ownership of the content is legitimate.

It is the second level of interaction that lets audience enter the participation frame by providing its readings of the content shared on the first level. As “imagined recipients” of the media observed, the audience here stands as a group of Ratified Hearers, whose reception is sanctioned by those

who have posted the content on video-sharing platforms (Goffman, 1981, quoted in Dynel, 2014). These Ratified Hearers can assume the Speaking role by posting comments under the content to which they react to, thereby making Speaker/Sender a Ratified Hearer of their messages. The rest of the audience that is intended by the Speaker/Sender occupies the rest of the Ratified Hearer role as the Third Party. Dynel suggests that illegitimate participation, or overhearing, on the second level is almost inconceivable as all content shared is directed at some audience, perhaps except for those situations when audiences who view and respond to the shared content have no official state access to video-sharing platforms in general (2014). All in all, participation roles on this level are limited to a Speaker/Sender who enters the frame from the first level, Ratified Hearers who could occupy the roles of Speakers if they write down their reactions to the content, and Ratified Third Party that interacts with the video without leaving comments in the comment sections, but rather participating more passively through likes or dislikes. Most interaction on this level is initiated by Ratified Hearers, who can either produce messages directed to the Speaker/Sender with Speaker/Sender being able to respond as a Ratified Hearer or Target of the comments directed at them. Hearers as Speakers on this level participate in message exchanges with the Speaker/Sender by commenting on their choices, posing questions, complimenting, and largely blessing. Though in all cases the video Sender/Speaker role was not occupied by children for obvious reasons, the communication then on the second level was directed at their parents or those relatives and closed ones who shared the videos on the platform. Children were still implicated as Primary Addressees and Targets of the blessings shared despite them not actually occupying the roles of a Speaker/Sender. As it will become clear, co-Speaking as a communal blessing act performed by a large group of Hearers is to be traceable on this level along with self-Speaking, that is realized along blessing exchanges directed at Speakers/Senders.

Dynell introduces the third level of communication that is extended to the exchanges held primarily between YouTube commentators (2014). While the second level comprised of dynamics held between Hearer Speaker/Sender or vice versa (largely rare), the participation frame of this level is expanded onto all commentators together who are scattered across the world spatially and whose exchanges occur atemporally. The exchanges of messages between different commentators, who occupy the roles of Speakers and Hearers on this level, are mostly observational. For instance, users have discussed together the choices made by children during the concluding fate-defining ritual of tusau kesu ceremonies observed. A portion of comments on this level might stand as “isolated free-floating turns” directed at a generalized entity if not no one, with little or no cohesion quality whatsoever (Dyner, 2014). Such comments were categorized into the Miscellaneous category, with mostly brands advertising their services or products, e.g. paraphernalia sold for tusau kesu performances. On this level, the users communicate with each other, with Speaker/Sender also being able to participate as both Speaker and Hearer.

As mentioned before, the role of Unratified Hearer is impossible on platforms like YouTube and TikTok as authors of the videos always have an intended audience of their content. As for the content that is stolen and reposted on TikTok, one might say that it lacks a coherent audience due to the absence of the actual Speaker/Sender participation in the framework. This means, that the video’s interactions on the second and third levels will not comprise the real Speaker/Sender. However, they will still be implicated in communication, specifically in blessing-sharing exchanges, since they are visible in the audio-visual texts themselves. This means that while the real Speaker/Sender might be excluded from the participation frame, they will still be involved in

communication at least as Targets of the blessings and questions directed at them. Considering the issue of content theft and reporting, the next discussion will ignore such situations and take the authentic role allocations in consideration.

TARGETS

A participant role of Target was introduced by Levinson in his critique and reimagining of Goffman's framework - he suggested to further break down the relevant roles of Speaker and Hearer into basic and derived categories to neatly classify the empirical distinctions between actors included in communication (1988). He proposes to make a distinction between a Source and a Speaker as those speaking may not always be those who create the message. This is rather similar to Goffman's distinction between Speaker sub-roles, Author and Principal. As for the Hearer role (or Recipient in his theory), it is split into a Target and an Addressee role respectively as these positions are attributed with different degrees of message "recipientship": a Target is implicated by the message and Recipient is a mere receiver of it.

In the given part of the discussion of participant roles, I will be relying on both Levinson's and Irvine's discussions of Primary and Indirect Targets in communication to illustrate the nuances of "recipientship" of blessings shared in comment sections under TikTok videos. It will become clear that the reception end of blessing-comments is mapped not only among children observed in the videos, but also onto their parents and larger kin, other commentators, and users as selves. By including Targets in the discussion of participant framing, we can observe a much more nuanced and fluid engagement between actors involved in communication in both digital and physical

spaces. More specifically, a blessing-sharing act in the comments then stands as a speech act that travels further than the comment section itself - it expands the reception of the shared well wishes and targets also those that are placed in relational proximity to Primary Targets or Hearers of the videos shared as well as individuals not related to the videos at all, e.g. children as a generation.

PRIMARY TARGETS

The Primary Target is the main participant onto whom the message shared is implicated. Targets are directly influenced by what is expressed in the messages shared between Speakers and Hearers. In the dataset, the parents and the larger family of the child were involved as Targets in exchanges in the comments since they not only represented figures who posted the videos on TikTok but also appeared in the videos themselves. For instance, below in (12) we can see how commentators describe the beauty and the festivity of people depicted in the videos, who are also showered with well wishes and blessings. The author directs their comment to everyone shown in the video by addressing them with a plural second-person pronoun. In the second comment below, (12b), a prominent Kazakh singer, Roza, is addressed as the sole Recipient and Primary Target of the shared blessing. Though she might not be the person who uploaded the video and initiated the communication via this act as a Speaker/Sender, she is still involved in communication as someone whose actions were recorded in the video itself. As it can be observed, physical and temporal displacement do not limit one's participation in audio-visual and textual communication.

The last comment in the given section, (12c), is directed at another Primary Target, the entire generation of the youth. The user wishes all children to be as prosperous as the children of the

famous and successful Roza Rymbaeva. This is a blessing whose reach extends over the video itself, traveling further to target not only children of the nation but perhaps the children of the world.



(12) а. Какие все красивые!Дай Бог Вам здоровья и счастья! 🥰	Everyone is so beautiful!May God give You health and happiness! 🥰
б. Роза курдасым, кутты болсын!Узагынан суиндирсин.Немерен коп болсын..Биздер шобере суйип жатырмыз!!!	Roza my friend, congratulations!May it bring you long-lasting joy.May you have many grandchildren..We too already adore our great-grandchildren!!!
с. Розанын балларындай болсын барлык баллар!	Let all children be like the Roza’s children!

Children addressed in the comments by various cute names became the most prominent representatives of Primary Targets of the comments: dozens began with various words of endearment, and their reach was directed at children (13). The use of the second person possessive pronoun and a singular imperative form of the verb points that these comments were directed at one addressee, the child from the video. Users of TikTok were congratulating the children on their first steps and wishing them to have a very happy, sweet life.

(13) а. 😊😊 иий жаным главное будь счастлива ❤️❤️❤️❤️	👁️ eee my soul be happy that's all ❤️❤️❤️❤️
б. Пусть твоя жизнь будет сладкой 🍬	Let your life be sweet 🍬
с. ТӘЙ, ТӘЙ БАЛАПАНЫМ, ҚАДАМЫҢ ҚҰТТЫ БОЛСЫН	TOP, TOP BABY, MAY YOUR STEP be WELL

In (13c) we can also observe how the commentator aligns the sentiment of their comment with the depicted actions in the video - as the child was starting to walk, holding their father's hand, one could hear a very gentle murmuring in the background with a salient chorusing of тәй-тәй standing out. The given phrase is verbalized during tusau kesu ceremonies or, in general, during moments when children make their first attempts at walking. Translated as “stomp-stomp”, the phrase is supposed not only to support and motivate the child to make a firm step but also to provide the child with a direction to move, as it rhythmically conveys the pacing of children's steps. The phrase is also included in the traditional songs that are played during the ritual to soothe the child and to mark the walking part of the ritual. Though the author of the comment might be responding to the video by writing down the canonical phrase that children hear during such an event, they might be unknowingly acting out a co-Speaker role, considering the salience of this echoing reduplication. There is then a group of people who could be saying this phrase in real life when the child is walking down the aq zhol during their tusau kesu, along with the song playing out in the background that also contains the given phrase. On top of this, albeit physically and temporally removed from the event itself, the commentators could be writing down comments with this phrase as well to support the child and participate in the ritual reenactment.

Similarly, the author of the comment below, (14a), is contributing to the co-Speaking with writing out тәй-тәй in their message:

<p>(14) а. Баршаңызға жұғысты болсын балапаным. тәй тәй қадамың құтты болсын </p>	<p>May you all be blessed my baby. stomp stomp congratulations on your step </p>
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In doing so, they also Target “you all” as recipients of the blessing they have expressed. In this way, they include all actors present in the video: the child and their family. In addition to this, one might also assume that “you all” might be directed at other potential you figure, e.g. other commentators from the comment section. Nevertheless, in this comment, the author, as a Recipient/Hearer position Sender/Speaker as a Ratified Addressee and a Target of the blessing posted. The use of the second-person plural defining pronoun lets us extend the participation network by including other users as Targets of the blessing as well. These potential Targets might not even be able to receive this message as comments sections were overwhelmed with hundreds of different comments. The message could have been easily lost amidst other comments that varied in terms of their content. However, the lack of Target’s ability to receive the message does not limit their ability to benefit from the called for blessing. Though removed physically and temporally online, users are able to disperse good wishes among many actors diffused throughout all levels proposed by Dynel (2014).

INDIRECT TARGETS

By virtue of familiar relationships with the children and their responsibility for the children's future and their upbringing, parents also take on roles of Indirect Targets of the blessing-containing comments. Irvine argues that the allocation of the role of the Target relies on one's ability to assess the intentions behind one's words - a speaker expects a Target to become aware of what they said (1996). Though we may not know if commentators intended the parents and the extended family of the children from the videos to be involved in the blessings-reception act as Targets, we may only assume that given the contagious character of the blessings themselves. Similar to brides in Irvine's fieldwork who were insulted through insults to their close ones, the kin of the children is then also implicated as Indirect Targets who get to be imbued with blessings shared in the comments (1996).

This implication of the nuclear family, and possibly also the larger extended family, as Indirect Targets aligns with the principles of contagious magic conceptualized by Frazer (1922). In his theory, objects, like items of paraphernalia, or persons who were once in contact continue to exert influence on one another even at a distance, even temporally removed. In the case of the bata-style comments, the child, their parents, and even the extended family are all bound by social and affective proximity, which makes the blessings directed at the child be also spread to those connected to them through the imagined continuity of kinship and guidance. Blessings get diffused along kinship lines, significantly reinforcing their own.

To illustrate, we can see how authors of the comments below make well wishes directed at children’s future (15). Children’s literal and figurative ability to walk, civil stance, skillfulness, and adoration by their families were all projected in the blessings shared.

<p>(15) а. Қадамың құтты болсын, балапан! ❤️</p>	<p>May your step be happy, little baby ❤️</p>
<p>б. 🥰🥰🥰 пусть растёт большим и здоровым гражданином Казахстана 🥰🥰🥰🥰 поздравляю</p>	<p>🥰🥰🥰 let him grow up as a big and healthy citizen of Kazakhstan 🥰🥰🥰🥰 congratulations</p>
<p>с. Пусть растёт вам на радость. и будет настоящим джигитом</p>	<p>Let the child grow up to your joy. and be a real slashing fellow.</p>
<p>д. Пусть у мвлышв будет светлая и счастливая ,жизнь, 👍👍👍👍👍👍</p>	<p>Let the child’s life be bright and happy, 👍👍👍👍👍👍</p>
<p>е. кадамы құттыболсын 🥰 Ата Апасына еркелеп жүреберсын 🥰</p>	<p>May his step be happy 🥰 Let him be pampered by his Grandpa and Grandma 🥰</p>

In the first comment, 15a, the author directs their blessing to the child by addressing them as “балапан”, literally translated as “little chick” and figuratively and lovingly used to refer to babies. The “steps” of the child can also be approached in two ways, both referring to the child’s ability to walk: 1) child’s literal steps, their posture, and stance; 2) child’s life path that they will walk along. The success of one’s steps, then, in both of the variations of meaning, strongly relies on

parental support. This connection then implies that parents would be in charge of securing the happiness of their child's steps in life. Hence, while the child is marked as the Primary Target of the blessing shared, the parents stand as Indirect Targets, onto whom the responsibility of realization of the blessing is put.

Similarly, in the next few comments, 15b-15e, parents become involved as Indirect Targets as they are responsible for their children's acquisition of necessary skills and the lifestyles wished. The parents, though not directly named or addressed in the comments, are implicated in communication in the comment section due to their relationship to the addressed primary Recipient/Hearer of the comments posted. Considering that the achievement and success of the blessings shared strongly relies on the kin of the child, more importantly on the parents, the Target role is then dispersed among several people.

GOD AS A HEARER AND AN ULTIMATE DESTINATION

A great portion of the blessing comments included the reference to revered names. Commentators referred to the divine entity by naming them in the comment or by addressing them directly. Variations such as God, Allah, and *Qūdai* were met. By invoking the revered names, commentators sought divine favor from the sacred entities to actualize the wishes that they expressed. Through the formulas of “*Allah razy bolsyn*” (“may God be pleased”), “*Alla qalasa*” (“if Allah wills it”), “*Allah bersin*” (“let Allah give one”), and “*Alla tıl-közden saqtasyn*” (“May Allah protect one from the evil eye”), commentators linguistically constructed a bridge between the spiritual and material worlds in order to boost the potency of the shared blessing.

Some comments express good wishes and invoke to God through the use of formulae in the Arab language. Expressions like “*Maşallah*” (“as God has wished”) and “*İnşallah*” (“God willing”) were used for appealing to the divine for protecting the children shown in the videos. *Maşallah* heavily varied in phonetic and orthographic spellings, with variants *Машаалла*, *Машаллах*, *ماشاء الله*, *МашаАллах*, *МашиаАлла*, *taşallah*, *Мə шə Алла* being expressed. According to Badarneh et al., the use of such “Allah Lexicon” communicates the predominance of the fatalist outlook of Arab society as according to Islam one’s intentions and will are in control of the divine will (2022). Similarly, the given comments suggest that their authors believe that the achievement of shared blessings, specifically the states that they communicate, rely strongly on the divine will. Thus, with such formulae, commentators have directed their blessing to the children and their families by transferring the task of fulfilling the shared wishes to God, specifically Allah.

Let us break down the participant roles of such comments from the dataset. The authors of the comments occupy all Speaker roles proposed by Goffman as they all create, animate, and stand by the expressed blessings. However, the reception of the comments is dispersed across several groups of participants. By invoking the name of Allah, commentators establish the deity as the ratified Addressee of the messages shared, and those about whom the blessing is about take on the Target role since they are implicated in the message. The rest of the Ratified Hearer position, as an acknowledged and legitimized participants of the interactions in the comment sections, the Third Party, includes all of the other users who read the blessing-comments, which includes the Sender/Speaker too.

For instance, in the examples below, we can trace how users implicate themselves as Targets of the shared messages:

(16) а. Аллахым бизге дагы ушундай татынакай кыз насип эт	My Allah give us also such a sweet girl
б. Қадамы құтты болсын 🍀 бізге де осындай тәп тәтті немере бұйыртсын Аллахым 🍀	Congratulations on your step 🍀 My Allah bless us with such a sweet grandson 🍀

Interestingly, the authors of 16a-16b wrote their messages on a collective behalf by asking Allah to grant them a child or a grandchild). This illustrates the dispersed authorship of the comment and the collective alignment of the author - the inclusion of others in the bounty of the blessing extends the Target role, which is now not occupied only by the author of the comment but also by the implied "us", who either could be people personally known by the author of the comment, the rest of the comment section itself, or even the entire nation of the country. In any case, the claimed luck for children is further dispersed among multiple participants, who may or may not even be aware of it. Those reading the comments in the given thesis may even be implied as Targets as well considering the contagious aspect of the shared wishes.

Similarly, the comment below also posits the author of the comment as a Target of the blessing shared. Although Allah is not clearly addressed, their role as a Hearer is secured through the invocation of the deity's name. These religious formulae that contains the invoked name of Allah

points that Allah is supposed to receive these messages since divinity is implicated as the responsible figure for the wish realization. In this way, Allah occupies both the roles of Hearer and Ultimate Destination who is presumed to not only hear the message but also bring it about in real life.

In these comments, God has acted as both audience of the blessings and their Ultimate Destination. Such a duality in participation places the deity in a very special position within the larger participatory structure of the comment sections. As a participant that cannot directly respond to their Speaker/Senders, at least verbally, the participant role of God therefore differs and the deity is invoked not to reply necessarily, but to act instead. God is seen as the one who will realize the illocutionary force of the blessing.

Self-targeting will be discussed more in depth further down in the **SELF AS A TARGET** section.

(17) а. Алла нәсіп етсін осындай немере маған да!	May Allah grant me a grandson like that!
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The given divine-invoking comments below in (18) frame children from the videos as Targets of the shared blessings. While the deities invoked stand as primary recipients, the Addressees/Hearers, of the blessings, children too occupy the roles of Hearers. These comments might not contain any deictic references to children, but they do exhibit a commentary of children that could point to their direction in terms of reception of the message.

(18) а. дай Аллах здоровья счастья успехов... 🙏🙏🙏	Give, Allah, [to you] health, happiness, and success... 🙏🙏🙏
б. хорошенькая такая, дай Бог всего самого хорошего	[she's] so pretty, God, give [her] all the best

The inclusion of Allah in all of the illustrates examples as a participant is largely based on the Muslim belief that success is achieved via divine involvement and guidance (Badarneh et al. 2022). Essentially, Allah is envisioned as having the final say in the success hunt of the addressee of the well wish shared in the blessing. Commentators then expand the traditional network of participation by invoking the divinity that is physically removed from the real world for intervening in the destiny of the Target/Hearer or Hearers. By inviting the Gods and spirits who “never speak and never appear in visible form”, users then go beyond the phenomenal field to increase the potency of their wishes (Hanks, 1996; Sweet, 2020). The association of good wishes with divine forces illustrates the “insider” state of the addresser and their sociocultural appropriate stance thereby marking an act of not only expression of belief and obedience to Allah but also an expression of common group attitudes of the society (Badarneh et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, not all participants might legitimize spiritual beings as ratified participants due to their personal disbelief in their potency. For instance, Hanks argues that the way people approach the question of spiritual materiality and presence impacts the picture that they form of the participation network: those who do not believe in spiritual power might not find the deities invoked or icons present during prayers as having any agency in the participatory dynamic (1996). Hence, the Third-Party group of the divine comments posted under TikTok videos who are not

believers may not consider Allah as a Ratified participant but a mere rhetorical device. Rather, for those who address their blessings to Allah, the spiritual being, therefore, becomes an active legitimate participant.

SELF AS A TARGET

The “complex calculus” of role mapping can also be extended to the aspect of selves (Irvine, 1996). Within the dataset, a fraction of comments contained self-talk, a case when the Speaker and the Addressee of the expressed blessing coincided one user. In the following comments, the addressers, while sharing good wishes to the addressees, the children and their families, direct the wishes to themselves as well, thereby taking on two participant roles simultaneously.

First, it seems like as Hearers/Recipients, who become Speakers by virtue of responding to the videos, users have largely communicated well wishes to the actors involved in the videos. While this is true, a deeper look at the dataset reveals a change in addressee considering that the wishes are directed not only at their Recipients but also at the authors themselves. By changing their alignment in the comments, users also address the divine being to bring about the blessing realization. This means that the implicated Target of the wishes shared changes to the users themselves.

To illustrate, in the section below, (19), we may observe how commentators shifted their alignment of self as an attempt to gain benefit as possible participants of the ritual performances held in the videos. Though the users are addressing the children in the videos and describing their observed endearing qualities, they close their comments by asking for a similar fortune. Hence, the recipientship of the blessings relayed in these comments is dispersed between actors from the

videos and users themselves, with children and their families and users occupying the Target role together.

<p>(19) а. Таттии 🍀🥰 бакытты болсын! маган жугысты болсын</p>	<p>Sweet 🍀🥰 let [the child] be happy! may it come to me as well</p>
<p>б. Аман бол балапан. Маганда осындай суйкимди кыз жугысты болсын 🙏🙏</p>	<p>Be well little one. May I be blessed with such an adorable daughter as well 🙏🙏</p>
<p>с. 🍀 жаныбым бакытты бол маганда осындай жиен берсинши алла</p>	<p>🍀 sweetie-piiie be happy may God grant me such a niece/nephew too</p>

It may appear that such self-directed blessing comments have no other Ratified Hearer/Hearers other than the children and their families. Though it is not as obvious, but we can trace the other assumed participants on the reception end of such a self-talk. While the children and their kin are addressed in the comments posted and marked as their Hearers, the Hearer role gets also mapped onto the divine forces, including fate, as it is implied to receive the message. Hence, the role of Ratified Hearer is also occupied by spirits and deities who are believed to have agency in realizing the shared self-directed blessings. For instance, the comments from the *GOD AS A HEARER AND AN ULTIMATE DESTINATION* part, (16a-16b), illustrate the assumed reception by Allah who is supposed to realize the shared self-directed blessings. In any case, self-directed blessings might

posit both children and self as Targets, but their reach is extended to the entity that will materialize the blessings.

Badarneh et al. researched congratulatory speech acts in graduation notebooks and observed that the use of self-directed wishes embedded in congratulatory blessings not only indicates identification with the hearer of the wish but also boosts the discussed wish for them (2022). By ingraining selves as Targets of the blessings, users have shown their appreciation of tusau kesu as an important life achievement of not only children but also their kin. Such group recognition of the given ceremony as a benefit able to be shared by multiple participants illustrates the shared value of procreation and tradition upkeep.

Similarly, while the given comments below, (20), do not contain blessings directed to the children from the videos, the acts of Targeting selves as potential beneficiaries of similar tusau kesu ceremonies imply the wishes themselves. By referencing to a ceremony from the observed video as “such a [great] tusau kesu” and to the little girl from one of the videos as “such a wonderful girl”, the users illustrate their appreciation of the observed events and behaviors. By assigning selves as potential enjoyers of similar blessings then, the users bless the Primary Recipients of their comments without directly addressing them.

(20) а. менің қызыма да жұғысты болсын осындай тұсау кесер той 🥰	may my daughter also be blessed with such a tusau kesu celebration 🥰
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<p>б. @Қызыма осындай қыз бұйырса Алланың назарында бол яқызым Алла қаласа алла қоса Әумин 🙏🙏</p>	<p>May @my daughter be blessed with such a wonderful girl may you always be in God's sight my dear if God wills, may He give Amen 🙏🙏</p>
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CO-SPEAKERS

As a collective role, according to Irvine, co-Speaking emerges through participation shifts - one has to be made aware of when to initiate the co-Speaking act along with other participants, especially along with the primary Speaker (1996). By observing Wolof griot poetry performances, Irvine found that several people could engage in co-Speaking through co-Singing of the chorus parts of the songs (1996). However, there was one important condition that constituted the occupation of the given co-Speaking role, which is an instruction by the primary singer to repeat the song words after them. This implied a participation shift from a Hearer instructed to a co-Speaker performing. In addition to this, the co-Speaking was further expanded beyond the poetry performances by acts of recirculation, in which people who observed the co-Speaking animated the voices of those who performed griot singing, thereby also engaging in co-Speaking.

As for the instances met in the dataset, the co-Speaking occurrences did not contain any signs of the prior shifts in participation. As we are dealing with textually transmitted blessings, we may not even have an opportunity to catch a glimpse of what happens behind the scenes of the comment-writing activities. For instance, in the first comment below, 21a, we can observe the user relaying a blessing directed to the child on a group behalf, using a plural form of the verb “to wish”.

Although we do detect a traceable individual author, the person who posted the comment under the video, the wording of the comment points to the fact that the author congratulates a child, “*балапан*”, along with someone else. By doing so, they provide space for communal voices to be heard as those Recipients of the videos who do not post but simply watch the videos might have liked the comment to participate in the blessing-giving act without writing down anything themselves in the comment section. We do not know for sure whether the author is referring to other commentators in their comment and engaging in co-Speaking together with other users or whether they are merely using a first-person plural pronoun for no other reason.

(21) а. Ақжол тілейміз, теккана жақсылық болсың Балапан 🙌 🙌 🙌	We wish you all the best, let only good things happen to you, Little Baby 🙌 🙌 🙌
б. поздравляем 🙌 🇰🇿	congratulations 🙌 🇰🇿
с. поздравляем с первым шагом!	congratulations on a first step!

I would argue that this then happens accidentally, given the grand nature of participation of the commentators. As some videos of tusau kesu ceremonies received hundreds, if not thousands, of comments, it would be quite difficult to detect comments written by several people at the same time. However, given the repeated nature of some comments, I suggest that co-Speaking occurs in an unintentional communal nature. Dozens of voices overlap, given the high number of comments that contain increasingly similar blessings. For instance, the comment that contained the formulaic phrase of “*qadamyñ qūtty bolsyn*”, meaning “let your steps be blessed or happy”, appeared in the dataset 167 times. Similarly, the formulae of “*aman bolsyn*” (“let one be well”), “*baqytty bolsyn*”

(“let one be happy”), “*ömir üzaq bolsyn*” (“let life be long”), “*будь счастлива*” (“be happy”), and “*jol aşyq bolsyn*” (“let life path be open”), all were expressed 16, 11, 11, 8, and 29 times respectively. These ongoing expressions of standardized phrasings of blessings all, though voiced at different times and from different places, contribute to one another’s force by virtue of continuous invocation.

By referring to their group as we, the commentators then invite others to act as Co-Speakers of their blessings. The Hearers/Recipients of the video as a message then can take on the role of a Speaker without necessarily writing down anything. The act of liking the comment may have been used as a mechanism to show that they either support the comment or agree to act as co-Speakers, with the roles of Formulator and Transmitter being performed by the authors of the comments. The Sponsorship then is dispersed among those interested in the achievement of the shared blessings. Similarly, those who have liked the comments that contain first-person plural pronouns or verbs in plural forms might in this way share the stakes of the blessing’s realization.

If we view it from another angle, we might also assume that the commentators write collective blessings on behalf of either their family or a group of individuals who are physically and temporally close to them. In such a manner, they all participate as co-Speakers who get to speak and co-Formulate the blessing together from one account, with the owner of the account holding onto the role of Transmitter. As for the rest of the group, again, they might participate in the blessing-sharing act as co-Sponsors, and perhaps some of them have acted as Formulators, in case if the blessing was formulated by all of them together. Again, since we do not have access to the

“shadow conversations” that the users held before posting their comments, the lamination of roles proposed above is merely a theory.

Another interesting remark has to be made about the self-Targeting comments that express a co-Speaking character. The authors of the comments below, (22), position self and others as Targets of the blessings shared and blessings observed in the videos. These comments contain the use of the first-person plural pronoun which points to group-Targeting. As mentioned earlier, while the Transmitter positions are occupied by users who own the accounts that posted the comments, the Formulator role could be mapped among other users who get to be Targeted by the use of the first-person plural pronoun that creates a collective voice that Targets itself. Then the self-Targeting with the plural pronoun intrinsically performs the co-Speaking that occurs on a comment level, with the Third Party being invited to be self-Targeted, and on the comment section level, with multiple comments that have the same substance being posted together. Again, while temporally and physically removed from one another, Recipients/Hearers of the videos are able to speak and enjoy the blessings’ bounty together.

(22) а. Қутты болсын бизгеде жуғысты болсын	Congratulations let us be blessed like this too
б. Қадамы ҚҰТТЫ болсын!!! Бізге де жуғысты болсыншы осындай тәтті қыз немере.	May [the child’s] steps be blessed!! May we also be blessed with such a sweet granddaughter.

<p>с. О тап татти балым сол бизге де жугысты болсын бакытты болыңыздар шын жүректен куттыктаймыз 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰</p>	<p>Oh, such a sweet child may this blessing come to us too wishing you happiness congratulations from the bottom of our hearts 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰</p>
<p>д. тәп тәтті, қадамың құтты болсын,бізге жұғысты болсын 🙏</p>	<p>so sweet, may your steps be blessed, may this happiness reach us too 🙏</p>

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated how participation frameworks operate within the digital context of TikTok comment sections under videos with *tusau kesu* rituals. By applying theories of speech act, participation roles, and communicative metafunctions, we have identified the layered and dialogic nature of speaker-hearer relationships and the unique targeting structures that emerge in blessing-type comments specifically. These interactions have pointed to a variety of intended recipients of the blessings: starting from children, the primary actors of the ritual, and their larger family. Most interestingly, God and the self were also involved as ultimate targets of the blessings posted. This highlights the spiritual and reflexive dimensions embedded in blessings discourse. In addition to this, a complex negotiation of co-authorship has emerged, considering how multiple users aligned themselves as co-blessers within the comment threads. In doing so, the chapter provides interesting grounds for understanding how digitally illustrated *tusau kesu* rituals create spaces for shared agency in blessings communication.

CHAPTER THREE: ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON OBSERVED PARTICIPATION PECULIARITIES IN DATASET

This chapter approaches the question of how TikTok users participate in digital rituals not only through blessings and direct comments but also through more complex communicative strategies such as innuendo and reported speech. These forms of indirect or double-voiced commentary reveal how participants negotiate roles, critique observed practices within the larger tusau kesu ritual, and animate multiple layers of speaker-hearer positions within a single utterance. Drawing on Goffman's and Irvine's theories of participation, this chapter will illustrate how such utterances contribute to the expansion and fragmentation of participation frameworks in a digital context, showing that the comment sections of tusau kesu videos function as dynamic spaces of a multi-voiced interaction.

INNUENDO

Innuendos, allusive remarks when “someone pretends to speak directly... but sends a hidden message”, also appeared in the dataset (Goffman, 1981). The authors of these comments strongly criticized the organizational choices of ceremonies, the actions of the observed individuals in the video, and the overall ceremony performances themselves.

To illustrate, the comment below, 23a, illustrates a critique of the part of the ceremony when a child chooses an object that defines their zhol, their destined path in life. As a Ratified Hearer/Recipient, the author of the comment below relies on innuendo to point out how parents in

the video were behaving during the ritual (one could see how eager they were about certain life-defining objects and pushing the child to choose them). This is yet another curious case of how a hearer communicates with a particular speaker, without directly addressing them in the message.

(23) а. Походу кто-то не понимает, что ребёнок должен сам выбрать предмет, а не то что ему предлагают.	It seems like someone doesn't understand that a child should choose an object themselves and not what is offered to him.
б. Қыздың тұсауын әйел адам кеспейма	Shouldn't a woman cut the girl's tusau
с. киген көйлегі ыңғайсыз емеспе, етегине суришип журғо	isn't the dress uncomfortable, she keeps tripping on the hem.
д. Жаль что пачки денег кладут, а стетоскоп, книгу, указку нет.	It's a pity they put stacks of money, but not a stethoscope, book, or pointer
е. Пышақпен кеседі тұсаулы ,мына әйел қазақ па? 🤔	One should cut the tusau (threads) with a knife, is this woman kazakh? 🤔

Critique was one of the common response choices of commentators and some of the innuendo containing comments also display criticism with interesting participation structures observed. For instance, the comments from above, 23b-23c, have a blurred Addressee role. By putting a tag question in the end of their comments, users have softened their critique of the act of cutting the threads by a man and the choice of the dress for the little girl in one of the videos. The use of a tag question implies that someone on the reception end is called to answer the question posed. Still,

with the blurred Addressee, who could be represented by other TikTok users who see the comment or the video author, no response was secured. Possibly, in an attempt to use the tag question as a reflective tactic to call for a discussion of the observed peculiarities in the videos, Speakers/Senders of the comments address anyone who is open for such a discussion. By leaving the Addressee role blank, users expand the network by letting anyone respond to their queries.

The same cannot be said about the other two comments, 23d-23e. In the first one, it may be assumed that the author is subtly criticizing those who put the stacks of money as one of the items that the child could take during the final act of tusau kesu that marks the child's destiny. What the author could have meant is that if the child chooses a provided stethoscope, book, or pointer, they could grow up as educated and cultural individuals. However, the stacks of money, according to the author of the comment, may not be as desirable in terms of its destiny-influencing ability. Still, regardless of their view, it is also hard to trace the Addressee of the comment - while it can be the criticized parent or member of family who chose money as an item for the selection act of tusau kesu, we should not eliminate the rest of the Hearer/Recipient group, the Third Party and Unratified Participants, as potential intended audience for the critique. The negative commentary may have been an attempt to comment on an overall tendency to utilize money in such a ritual. If that would be so, the Addressee of the message would then be the entire nation as those who commit such a "crime" in the eyes of the author of the comment could lurk among those who have access to the comment sections and those who do not, meaning that the comment could have been a cry-in-the-air type of message that was received by not all its intended Addressees.

As for the second comment, though we can trace the quoted “she”, the message is not directly addressed to her. Instead, similar to the previous comment, the given message is addressed to the larger group of people who could identify whether the mentioned woman is Kazakh or not. Such an innuendo is utilized to invite others to assess the threads-cutting character or the woman who did it in the discussed video. She is then occupying the role of a Primary Target whose actions are being critiqued in the given message and potential responses to it. However, if we make a step back and look at the comment from a more distant angle, it can also become possible to assume that the author of the comment is criticizing all Kazakh people who commit such a mistake by choosing scissors to cut the threads of children during the ritual as the author believes that it is intrinsic to Kazakhs to know how the cutting ceremony should be performed. As a result, the Ultimate Destination of this message then gets dispersed to the larger group of those who make the given mistake.

REPORTED SPEECH AS ANIMATING SPEECH

Reported speech was also used in the comment’s dataset - speakers referred to their own speech or speech of other people in writing down their reactions to the videos. These comments too illustrate curious points about the intricate structures of participation and the phenomenon of “voice animation” that results in a dispersed participation mapping (Goffman, 1981). These examples correspond to the double-voiced utterances, the utterances in which the form presupposes a second or even third and ongoing voices - such utterances are created in exchanges when one’s words are “borrowed, mocked, responded to, or given provocation” (Irvine, 1996).

<p>(24) а. у меня братик выбрал микрофон и моя бабушка так и сказала что он это выберит. Я всё видео давай деньги 💰💵</p>	<p>my brother chose the microphone and my grandma said that he would choose it. Me the entire video choose money 💰💵</p>
<p>б. 😂 Али Окапов когда ребенок выбрал домбру: мой сын</p>	<p>😂 Ali Okapov when the child chose the dombra: my son</p>
<p>с. ну чё вы от меня хотите?! 😏😏</p>	<p>well what do you want from me?! 😏😏</p>
<p>д. вы русская да? тогда надо писать мен орыс пын</p>	<p>you are Russian right? then you should write men orys pyn</p>

In the first comment, 24a, although the author is reporting on their grandmother’s words, saying that she predetermined the choice of the author’s brother when he had his ceremony, the most interesting part is the use of the indexical "I" (me in English) that belongs to the author themselves. The user here is describing themselves as a character at a certain point in the recent past: they embed and animate their past self. This is another frame of participation, the reach into one’s past, that extends the participation network by including the past self as a participant of the previously held discourse. Urban suggests that in reported statements, the “I” discussed is not “an actual in-the-world subject” but rather an imagined indexically referred to being (Urban 1989 quoted in Irvine, 1996). Hence, the references to such “implicit links to many [previously held] dialogues” further scatter and fracture participation among authors (Irvine, 1996).

Strikingly, in the next comment, 24b, the author imagines what the child's father from the video, a famous singer Ali Okapov, also a son of no less renowned singer Rosa Rymbayeva, would say or think when the child chose the dombra. This instrument defined him following his family's singing professional dynasty and this is why the author assumes that my son would be the most probable sentiment. The author, therefore, for a moment, acquires Ali Okapov's voice to make a fun remark on the video's actions. Such invocation of the singer's voice, albeit without the use of referential "I", engages in a reporting play in which the author of the comment refers to the child in the video by using "my" that belongs to the implicated or imagined reported speech realm. The personal pronoun refers back to the subject of the main clause, Ali. Although the author did not use quotative marks, we can infer that the personal pronoun refers to Ali Okapov, given the specific description before it. As a result, the voices of Ali and the author get intertwined, given the complexity of the animation invoked in the message (Bakhtin, 1981).

The author then "animates" Okapov trying his subjectivity in the comment by "constructing a projective relation" he would have to his son's choice during his tusau kesu (Goffman, 1981; Irvine, 1996). The author engages in a projected implicated dialogue, perhaps even an inner monologue, of Ali Okapov that reaches into the past since the video captured a moment that has already passed. Although this is a hypothetical scenario, the author repeats the statement by writing it in the comment, thereby creating a layered authorship for their comment. The Speaker role in this message then can be stratified into Goffman's Animator, Author, and Principal and Irvine's Sponsor, Formulator, and Transmitter. Both Author and Animator as well as Transmitter roles are taken by the author of the comment since they have written and posted the comment. The mapping of the Principal role is a bit blurry since the Author/Animator implies and projects Ali Okapov's

voice and his beliefs and thoughts of the discussed moment in the ceremony. While it is probable that Okapov would share the implied sentiment in a projection about his subjectivity, given his professional background, we do not know completely whether it is set in stone. Therefore, I suggest that both the author of the comment and Ali Okapov stand as Co-Animators and Co-Principles, albeit hypothetical for Okapov's case, of the given reported statement that reaches to the captured past, but the author themselves stand alone as an author of the entire comment itself since it is their own implication. As a result, participation then gets mapped onto Okapov regardless of the lack of his involvement in the communicative framework itself.

In the third comment, 24c, the author engages in the same projecting reporting act in which they animate the voice of the child in the video. Based on the confused reactions of the child to the ceremony, the author of the comment imagines their verbal response to the situation indicated by the "from me" part of the question posed. This question might be detached from the events in the video, as children do tend to act confused or annoyed during their tusau kesu ceremonies in general. It could have been a broadly recognizable statement that could be ascribed to any child involved in tusau kesu. However, compared to the comments from the comment sections of the other videos, the video under which this comment was posted proved to depict the child actually confused in comparison to other children from the rest of the videos. Therefore, I suggest that this commentator animates the voice of the child and, similar to the previous comment, takes on the role of a Co-Animator as, even if it is their choice of words that they wrote down in the comment, they are producing or animating them with the projected child. Hence, the question of principal role mapping comes again - whose position is established in the quoted statement? This projecting impersonation points to the fact that the stance encoded in the question belongs to the child - the

author shifts their footing for a moment to make the projection. However, since it is a projected stance, could we also assume that the author becomes a co-Principal? Irvine poses a question of participant “leakage” in reported speech statements when the participation of one speech situation permeates into another (1996). In this example in particular, we can see how the author of the comment modifies the question posed based on how the child would pronounce it - the word “хотите”, “you (plural or formal) want”, is misspelled as “хочите”. Indeed, metathesis, an accidental switch of phonemes in a word, is common among children’s early speech development and is expected to happen up to the age of four and five (Qasem, 2023). Mnemonic processes play a huge role in the generation of such metathetical mistakes as children might attach the pronunciation of words to the words of similar word families (Tyurin, 2006). The imagined speech situation is also accompanied by the use of smiling face emojis at the end of the comment. These could imply the author’s stance-taking on the projecting situation that “leaks” into the projected speech situation as the comments communicate the author’s emotions. I suggest that the child here is invited as a participant as a projected Co-Animator and Co-Principal, but the author of the comment stands as an Author alone as they have written down the words for the comments. As a result, in an attempt to tease the child’s voice, the author of the comment experiments with the limits of the participant structure and creates a multi-participant Animator/Speaker role that extends to an imagined individual (Sweet, 2020).

The final comment, 24d, is an exemplary example of the situation without any leakage of participation frames as we have a distinct Author, Animator, and Principal as the author of the comment takes all of the given roles. It might seem that there is a sort of animation in the final part of the comment, however, the given embedded statement translated into Kazakh is not about the

author. Instead, it refers to another commentator, who earlier wrote a comment containing a mistake in Kazakh - the phrase “I am Russian” was written by them as “I am in Russian”. So, in this comment, the author may not necessarily “animate” the voice of the person to whose comment they are responding to, but rather they change their own footing in order to momentarily show them how to correctly state in Kazakh that they are Russian. Hence, the “I” is a generally imposed persona of the other commentator, who is not in any way involved in the participation frame of the statement.

Thus, one can observe how the participation frames of statements of pragmatic present and those of implicated projected ones are occasionally weaved via a complex relationship. This is illustrative of the inevitable “multiplicity of frames” as the comments discussed bear the traces of different “voices”, subjectivities, and stances (Bakhtin, 1981 quoted in Irvine, 1996). Through stance-retaking and stance-changing acts, some of the comments have exhibited blended mappings of the Speaker roles. Diffused authorship within Co-Animator and Co-Principal roles were taken on by, perhaps not individuals, but rather imaginary projected beings who were created for the sake of humor and inference. This further proves the point that

CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

Given the diachronic character of blessings in Kazakh culture, in distinguishing the participants of blessing-sharing acts, one needs to look beyond the given Speaker. Blessings in Kazakh culture are diachronic in a sense that the set expressions used today in blessing-giving acts sedimented formulae that have been around for many decades. Blessings are therefore “inherently dialogic and saturated with past voices” (Hanks, 1996). The formulas as “quotations received from ancestral generations” may have been shared, reported, quoted on, echoed, and mimicked among many generations, the last of whom now creatively re-approaches them online, with instruments like emojis or likes being available (Irvine, 1996). Similar to prayers that were described as “living [and constantly beautified] speech”, blessings stand as a similar form of speech that continually changes based on people’s needs and knowledge (Hanks, 1996). By constantly reaching back to the past and relying on the “sedimentation of language acquired over a lifetime”, users now invoke voices of cultural authority that created the expressions and held them up (Hanks, 1996). So, when we try to identify the Sponsors of the blessings shared, we may not have the full picture of all the actors involved unless we dig deeper into the past, which will reveal that those voices that have educated one on how to give a blessing are now reflected in the blessings of their learners.

In a similar fashion, while the blessings are directed at children, thereby making them Primary Targets, the recipientship of the comments is dispersed between their kin, more likely their parents who have shared the videos, the other users on TikTok, some of whom might share that they wish the same happened to them. Nevertheless, blessings always have an implied Hearer participant, whose occupation might belong to one individual or dozens of them at the same time.

As we have seen, blessings shared textually on social media provide a great opportunity to look deeper into the question of how authorship and recipientship dynamics are scattered among not just two individuals, but many. In addition to this, participation is also stretched across time, with voices from the past being echoed in invocations in the present. Spatially as well, those who may not be within the participation frame physically might be still implicated as Speakers, Hearers, and Targets. As a result, all of the observed cases of participant role shifting or overlapping illustrates how commentators' footings, or alignments of themselves, have varied: some were speaking on their own behalf and others spoke for their community. In addition to this, cases of spiritual invocations and self-talk highlighted the fluidity of users' stances.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored how bata persists and transforms within the digital context of TikTok. At the heart of the study was the question of how blessing speech acts evolve when placed in asynchronous and textual digital spaces. Focusing on tusau kesu videos as a core life-cycle ritual that produces blessings as a response, this research analyzed comment sections to understand the new participation frameworks emerging in digitally shared blessings. The findings show that bata in its digital form becomes an act of collective, asynchronous, and atemporal participation: rather than a single elder, a sage, addressing a single young child, we see a dispersal of both speaker and hearer roles across users, all dispersed spatially, socially, and temporally. In this context, ritual authority is no longer centralized in a sage figure but is collectively distributed, with many users taking on aspects of the elder's role. This has also been observed in situations when users invoked blessings for themselves or for the larger imagined audiences, such as the whole Kazakh nation. TikTok's technological affordances thus enable bata to evolve without losing its cultural significance. As a result, participation frameworks of this practice become more flexible and layered: multiple speaker and hearer roles co-exist, and non-verbal acts such as likes or emojis function as forms of co-speaking or silent speakerhood. In addition to this, the frequent invocation of Allah in the examined comments has pointed to the inclusion of a metaphysical dimension, in which divine agency is the ultimate addressee and fulfiller of the blessing, into the larger participation framework of bata. By demonstrating how bata operates in a decentralized, asynchronous, and collective framework, this thesis contributes to broader understandings of ritual language practiced in the digital realm. This thesis was a larger attempt to shed light on the changing forms of bata tradition. In tracing how bata is reimagined through digital participation,

the study highlights the ongoing power of blessings as tools for building youth in a virtual space of TikTok.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Bata, as observed in this study, persists and transforms in the digital space as a speech practice shaped by platform-specific affordances and audience interaction patterns. Having studied bata within the contexts of TikTok, this study stands as a limited one, considering the lack of consideration of other platforms on which bata is also transmitted and shared today. The question of whether there would be different participatory patterns on different platforms stands unclear as of now. Another important note to consider is that shadow and silent participation were not appropriately analyzed. Due to the fact that users can engage with the content seen on TikTok without actively responding to it, much of the non-verbal participatory dynamics remain invisible, complicating attempts to fully capture the reception of bata on TikTok. Hence, I propose future research to include ethnographic methods to better understand the full spectrum of participatory behavior, including passive forms of engagement not only on TikTok but on other platforms as well.

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APPENDIX: VIDEO LINKS

The following is a list of publicly accessible TikTok videos that were viewed and analyzed for this thesis. All videos were available on the public domain at the time of research. However, two of the videos have either been privated or deleted from the platform. The selection below includes those videos that are now publicly accessible on TikTok. They feature the *tusau kesu* ritual and they were examined for their performative and linguistic content for the purposes of this study. This appendix is provided to ensure transparency and allow for further research.

Description	TikTok Link	Engagement of the Video
Tusau kesu of a little girl performed in a restaurant. Use of hashtags in the description to the video #тұсаукесер #1жас #тусаукесеридея #тусаукесер #тренды #тикток #лайфхак #рек	https://www.tiktok.com/@balbala.kentau/video/7301241980544191749	1857 likes, 42 comments, 511 saves
Tusau kesu performed in a restaurant. Little boy named Ansar. The description of the video contains the lyrics to the song playing in the background. Use of hashtags #1жастұсаукесу #Аңсар	https://www.tiktok.com/@baha_beauty/video/7300872448130452742	849 likes, 35 comments, 90 saves
Compilation of the key moments of the tusau kesu ceremony of a little boy held outside. Yurt observed in the background. White dresscode followed by family members and guests.	https://www.tiktok.com/@wowaraika/video/7267198562704837893	25.8k likes, 128 comments, 1394 saves

<p>Tusau kesu ceremony of a little boy from an international family. A little remark from the a member of the family who posted the video in the description on the importance of the ritual to their family. Use of hashtags #тұсаукесер #тұсаукеcy #акжол</p>	<p>https://www.tiktok.com/@wowalmaty/video/7165769954095140101</p>	<p>2659 likes, 220 comments, 54 saves</p>
<p>Tusau kesu ceremony of a little girl from an international family held at home. Use of hashtags #день#рождение#годик#семья#алматы#казахстан#разрезаниепут#тұсаукеcy#казахскаятрадиция#тайтай1жастұсаукеcy#видео#тикток#рекомендации#2023#малышитикток</p>	<p>https://www.tiktok.com/@yessem_/video/7219735769374625029</p>	<p>27.8k likes, 248 comments, 1276 saves</p>
<p>Tusau kesu ceremony of a little boy, son of Ali Окапов and grandson of Roza Rymbayeva, held in a restaurant. The description to the video contains a blessing made by the video poster, presumably a member of the family. Use of hashtags #тұсаукеcy #1жас</p>	<p>https://www.tiktok.com/@sabonya_alim/video/7340954061316902149</p>	<p>17.6k likes, 352 comments, 699 saves</p>
<p>Voiceover of a video with tusau kesu ceremony of a little girl, niece of the author of the video. The author is describing the nature of the ritual and asks their audience what they have chosen during their own tusau kesu ceremonies. The description to the</p>	<p>https://www.tiktok.com/@travelove100/video/7182574251084385541</p>	<p>18.8k likes, 597 comments, 974 saves</p>

video also contains a note on the importance of the ritual to Kazakh culture.		
Tusau kesu ceremony of a little girl held at home. A lot of guests observed in the background. Use of hashtags #тұсаукесер #той #ЯснaМирacқызы #2023 #т иктoк	https://www.tiktok.com/ @itszhaneeka/video/730 0933857291799814	12.5k likes, 946 saves, 1199 shares